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AN EVALUATION OF THE ONTARIO "EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS" POLICY

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Alan Thomas

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A. INTRODUCTION

In 1987 the Ontario Ministry of Education reported 20,726 adults, 22 years and over engaged in day-time, credit programs in secondary schools in Ontario. If the limit is dropped to 19 years and over, which, when considered in the light of the reported number of re-entrants, 39,902 , which means that considerable numbers of those students have left school and returned, the total becomes 47,579. If we add to that total the number of credit students admitted under the "continuing education" category, which totals 105,785 the grand total of "adults" studying in secondary schools in Ontario, in 1987 reaches 153,364, approximately 20% of the total number of credit students in secondary schools. The same number in 1986 was 132,870 approximately 19% of the total.(Footnote: The figures were obtained by combining totals of "day-time" students, nineteen years and older in credit programs, 1986;Table 4.31; 1987 Table 4.31 , with totals of all students at the Grade 9 plus level, but registered under continuing education: 1986; Table 4.68, 1987 Table 4.68. In both cases, sources were "Education Statistics", Ontario, 1986 and 1987, Ministry of Education, Government of Ontario; Queen's Printer for Ontario; 1987 and 1989).

The increase in numbers between these two reports, a reflection of a relatively steady increase in adult participation in secondary school level of study over the past decade, suggests a trend that will continue, unless there is some radical alteration in the present practice of the Ministry and most Boards of Education with respect to adults seeking opportunities to achieve secondary school diplomas. The present rhetoric stemming from almost all sources of economic and political authority about the need for a

better educated work force, and the tendency to utilize existing educational instruments, regardless of the fact that they were designed primarily for the young, and for quite different economic and cultural circumstances, does not suggest such an alteration. Indeed it suggests the reverse.

In 1974, the Ministry of Education, consistent with other jurisdictions in Canada, and in the United States, developed policies designed to facilitate the return of older citizens to complete their secondary level education. These policies allowed for the granting of academic standing based on non-academic achievement, such as maturity credits; credits for equivalent education; and credits for training accomplished by means of apprenticeship programs. The policy was reaffirmed in the program revisions of1984. (Footnote; Ontario Ministry of Education (1984) OS:IS.) In essence the intent of the policy was to "bridge the gap" between school and employment or work, in the reverse of the usual direction. Applicants could re-enter formal education, at a more advanced place than the one at which they had departed, depending upon the evaluation of learning accomplished under other than formal educational circumstances.

At the time of its introduction, this policy was perceived as a means for enlarging access to secondary schools by segments of the population previously ignored or excluded. Apparently it reflected a combination of the last phase of the virtually unlimited enthusiasm for formal education that characterized the two decades following the second world war, and a new concern for unemployment related to an under-trained and under-educated work force in Canada, and particularly in Ontario. It was assumed that the policy as introduced was manageable by those Boards of Education that wished to utilize it, and that its implementation was within the existing knowledge and skills of the professional staffs. There is no indication of attention to the provision of additional leadership by the Ministry, or any other provincial body, in the sense of the development of instructions, training programs, or consultative resources.

Therefore, the figures of specific interest to this report are those to be found in the tables referring to "School Re-entrants " (ibid:1989; p.31) which reports an increase in the number of re-entrants from 30,366 to 39,902 between the years 1982-83 and 1986-87. It is to be noted that the number of re-entrants in 1986-87 constituted a little more than half the 73,820 retirements (ibid; p.29) in the same year. "Re-entrants are students who re-

enter a publicly supported secondary school after officially withdrawing.....There were 5142 more re-entrants in 1986-87 than in 1985-86, an increase of almost 15%. About 63% of the re-entrants were students 19 years and older" (ibid; p.23). The discrepancy between these figures and those previously reported lies in the fact that the present re-entry category does not include students who re-enter in the "continuing education " category. Nevertheless the existence of a substantial and growing trend of individuals (19+) who are returning to secondary school, and who are eligible for inclusion within one or more of the "maturity credit" categories seems well established.

In 1988, the Ministry of Education funded a proposal to evaluate the "Equivalent Standing for Mature Students " policy. In the fourteen years since the policy had been introduced no such examination had been undertaken. The policy, as introduced, established guidelines, which permitted considerable discretion on the part of Boards of Education, and through their agents, principals of individual schools. Informally collected evidence suggested a wide variation in the implementation of the policy, and despite a number of studies devoted to the inclusion of increasing numbers of adults in secondary schools, no specific attention had been paid to the details of the utilization of the policy. The specific objectives of this inquiry were:

1. To determine the extent to which students are applying for and receiving credit under the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy.

2. To describe the practices Boards of Education and Principals use to examine, assess, and award credit under the policy.

3. To examine the skills required for assessment, and how they are developed.

4. To identify the areas of difficulty schools and principals encounter in carrying out the policy.

5. To ascertain the perceived value of the policy for returning adults and their schools.

The proposed procedures included both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation, and involved:

- a questionnaire sent to each Board of Education enquiring into the Board's role in implementing the policy.

- a questionnaire to a sample of principals within selected Boards enquiring into specific practices, perceptions, and problems encountered in the implementation of the policy.

- interviews of a subsample of the principals involved.

- interviews with selected Ministry personnel.

In the period between the authorization of the grant and the commencement of the inquiry the Principal Investigator completed two other research projects, the findings of which, are germane to the present inquiry. The first of these," A Report on the Utilization of Experiential Learning as a Basis for the Granting of Admission and Advanced Standing in Education in Canada " (SSHRC; 1989) indicated a much wider use, at all levels of education in Canada, of non-academic criteria for determining admission and placement of potential students, than is generally assumed. It also revealed a considerable range in the associated practices, and a widespread interest and concern about their utilization. The second study, " The Impact of Older Students on Public Secondary Schools in Ontario," (OSSTF; 1988) provided considerable information about the utilization of the "Mature Student Policy". In particular it indicated the presence of two primary administrative practices with respect to the implementation of the policy by Boards of Education. In the first of these two policies the assessment of applicants and decisions regarding the awarding of credits is centralized within the Board; in the second, decisions are decentralized, approximately school by school, and to the principal officer responsible for continuing education. In the light of the findings of these two studies, it was decided to make some minor alterations in the procedure of the inquiry. The major change was to combine the proposed questionnaire to the sample of principals, or designated officers, with the interviews, on the grounds that sufficient quantitative information would be achieved by the initial questionnaire. It was also decided, in the light of the information available, to emphasize the qualitative aspects of the study more than the quantitative.

B. Summary of Findings

1. The "Equivalent Credit Policy" is in use in Ontario by almost all Public Boards of Education. After a slow start in the mid-seventies, it has grown steadily in terms of applicant volume since the early nineteen-eighties. Total numbers of applicants and recipients are difficult to obtain, though it would appear that the volume is less than the total number of adult students (19+) and certainly lower than the numbers of individuals in Ontario with less than Grade 12 completion.

2. The number of "maturity" or "life-experience " credits outstrips the other two classes of "equivalents" by a considerable proportion. The assessment on which the award of these credits is based requires the greatest amount of individual judgement on the part of the assessor.

3. Women outnumber men by about three to one in applying for and receiving equivalent credits, and in completing their programs.

4. The bulk of the applicants are to be found in the 25-45 age groups. Applicants under twenty predominate in a few Boards, and everywhere present particular problems.

5. The growth in the utilization of the policy among Boards in Ontario, has been part of the general growth in Board accommodation for older and/or more mature students. A particular aspect of this growth is the increasing centralization in the administration of decisions about equivalent standings.

6. There is no clear evidence that the availability of equivalent standing plays a prominent role in the individual decision to reenter a secondary school program. However, opinion is unanimous that is does play a critical role in the likelihood of a program being finished.

7. Implementation of the policy varies widely across the province in terms of: advertising and information; procedures for applying, for assessing, and for acknowledging credits; and the basis on which judgements are made. However, of almost universal utilization is the interview with each student, and the combination of mutual assessment and program planning.

8. The attitude that the policy is meant to be supportive of the applicant is equally universal in terms of the approach of the assessors and the facilities available.

9. Assessment is generally centered in one person in one school, or in a group of individuals in a central location. None of these individuals has received specific formal training for the task. Almost all have been informally apprenticed to a practitioner. Most common formal backgrounds are Guidance and Counselling and Special Education. All believe that maturity, plus wide experience in and out of education are essential background.

10. There is an important "local" factor in the successful implementation of the policy. Knowledge of the local community, local employment or lack of it, the circumstances of the applicant, plays an important role in the assessment.

11. While there is considerable variation across the province in the implementation of the policy, there is growing consistency within Boards, based on cooperative leadership. There has been evidence of "shopping around" within particular jurisdictions. There is very little evidence of such practice between Boards.

12. Almost all those engaged in assessment combine that responsibility with others. Most believe that the time required for proper assessment is seriously underestimated, and that there is a need for clearer job descriptions and role definitions.

13. Without exception all those interviewed like the work involved in the program, and believe that it is an important and valuable program for education in Ontario. They are convinced that it benefits the individual, the daily operations of the schools, and the community.

14. Again, without exception, all of the respondents believe that there would be enormous benefit for them and the program, if there was more provincial leadership, in terms of opportunities for consultation among themselves, with other Board authorities, and with representatives of the Ministry.

15. There is no evidence of systematic evaluation of the program, and little of the necessary foundations for "tracking" applicants so that such an evaluation could be undertaken. Almost all of the respondents would welcome such an enterprise, but believe it to be beyond their capacities at the present time.

C. Conclusions and Recommendations

What we are witnessing in the development of the Equivalent Credit Policy is the increasing interaction between two sets of social systems, formal education and employment, family life, community responsibility - that group that generally encompass and define adult life in Canadian society. Historically the two sets have been separated from each other, in space, and in time. However, the growth of demand for more certified formal education on the part of more and more people, and the growth of opportunity for original learning outside of the formal system, has made the increase in interaction, inevitable and inescapable. The recent study of "Experiential Learning in Canadian Education" (Thomas:SSHRC:1989) indicates that it, the interaction, is taking place at all levels of education in Canada to an ever increasing degree, though with little formal recognition, or systematic attention, except in the province of Quebec.

What is of the greatest importance, is that while this interaction between the adult community of potential students and the formal system(s) manifests itself in a myriad of slowly emerging administrative, programmatic, and financial arrangements, the Equivalent Credit Policy, like the more general practices associated with "Experiential Learning" and "Prior Learning Assessment" is the intellectual frontier of these developments. The basic issue is one of comparing various kinds of knowledge, and assessing whether what has been learned in one way, in one milieu, can be compared to, equated with, certified as, knowledge acquired in other ways, and in different milieu.

There are areas of research, and bodies of knowledge that can contribute to this inquiry, the sociological literature on "marginality' and "boundary-spanning" for example. However, both general and specific factors involved, suggest that nothing will substitute for some modest longitudinal inquiry into the future achievements of students who have been assessed and granted standing on a basis other than formal academic achievement.

Only in this way, with a rich basis for such research at hand, can we hope to make our various levels of education, and various providing agencies truly responsive to life-long potential for learning.

Therefore our recommendations fall into two classes, procedural recommendations with respect to the operation of the program under present circumstances, and structural recommendations that will expand its utilization, and our understanding of its dynamics, leading to a greater understanding of learning in society as a whole.

a) Procedural

1. There needs to be greater province-wide consistency in the provision of information about the availability of equivalent credits, basically in a shift from mere availability to more aggressive recruiting of potential students.

2. There needs to be greater consistency in the time at which equivalent credits are officially acknowledged. While some Boards delay that acknowledgement for varying time periods up until a program is completed, all of them provide the applicant with a "legal document", that amounts to a type of "promissory note", and could conceivably be negotiable by the student.

3. There needs to be increased attention to the treatment of the most youthful of applicants. With respect to their continuing "immaturity" and high rate of relapse, some additional support mechanisms seem indicated. The development of a more formal "learning contract" as employed by some Boards would seem to be advisable. Otherwise they have the same rights as others for consideration, and may soon begin to insist on them more loudly.

4. In general the procedures, and the various entitlements and responsibilities, including the margin of discretion available to Boards and individual assessors, need to be made clearer across the province. While in general applicants and recipients remain grateful, they are entitled to a clear understanding of the various rights and responsibilities involved.

5. Consideration needs to be given to an increased range of alternatives with respect to the four required senior credits. so that depending upon the extent of the program available, a greater coherence of career ambitions and functional skills may be achieved.

6. Consideration needs to be given to the "two credits per year since leaving school" formula, both with respect to its adequacy, and uniformity of application. The designation is arbitrary, but not without sense in terms of meeting the needs of current and past applicants - except the young - and does seem to reflect substance of achievement. However it does tend to discriminate against older individuals. An increase in the use of more specific evaluations might alleviate the problem.

b) Structural

1. There is a considerable amount of experience and commitment already developed in the province that needs to be acknowledged and built upon. The Ministry should support the kind of initiative shown by CESBA recently in holding a workshop on the procedures, in providing for the development of regular consultation and assessment of the implementation of the policy. Regulation, at this time, would be less productive than guidelines developed by means of mutual consultation. The consultation should be devoted to:

   - sharing information about procedures and demand.
   - sharing experience in making assessments, in terms of the skills required, and developing some codification of those skills.
   - experimentation with procedures for professional development of existing assessors and new entrants to the practice
   - development of means and procedures for reporting the implementation and utilization of the policy on an annual basis.

2. The lumping of undifferentiated "maturity" credits on the record of the recipient has served the policy adequately in the past. Current developments suggest the limits of the value of that practice, and the need for experimentation with explicit equating of experience with particular courses. In fact discussions with the assessors involved indicate that in the interviews they go a considerable distance towards such assessment. There is to be found, in the Experiential Learning

Movement" in the United States, the "Learning From Experience" developments in the United Kingdom, and in the province of Quebec, growing experience in making and using such assessments. To support the future needs of applicants in Ontario, and to allow the policy to reach its highest fruition, it would be wise for the Ministry, in consultation with the present practitioners, to experiment with the development of such more specific, and detailed assessments.

3. In the long run, the only true evaluation of the policy is to be found in the subsequent achievements of its beneficiaries. Present assessors worry about being too generous or too harsh, about helping the student and protecting the integrity of the program. Some worry about adulterating the diploma, others are firmly convinced that it is strengthened. The latter view raises interesting questions about the program as a whole. What is needed is a five to ten year study of the present and future recipients of equivalent credits. The foundations for such a study are to a degree in place with the increased computing capacity of various Boards. A small amount of funding and leadership could bring about the cooperative generation of adequate data for the study. Such a study would contribute immeasurably to the reduction of some existing prejudices about varying methods of learning.

4. The major use of the present program by women, and its obvious benefits for at least one female life pattern, suggests some special further inquiry. Is the implementation already being shaped by the fact that most of its recipients are women? Is it fair in its procedures and assessment to women in comparison with men. A majority of assessors and associated administrators are male. Does that bias the assessments in any way? The demand by the economic system for female intelligence can be met humanely by this program, perhaps better than any other.

It would seem that equivalent assessment, in association with its counterparts of experiential learning and prior learning assessment, is something of a sleeping giant. Originated as a generous, if minor facilitation of current "departures", it is now catering to those departees over a much longer time-span than was initially foreseen, and attracts more individuals, with the usual variations associated with voluntary choice,

each year. From the point of view of the formal educational system it represents a demand which has not yet been fully rationalized in terms of rights, programs, or finances. From the point of view of a society faced with an under-educated and therefore less flexible work-force, it represents a reasonable mechanism for resolving those inadequacies. From the point of view of a democratic society, in need of confident, learning, citizens, it seems to represent an unparalleled opportunity. At this moment the program is at a critical stage. It has gathered experience and a devoted operating personnel; it is increasing steadily in its visibility and attraction; it has thus far operated on a great deal of voluntary commitment, enthusiasm, and energy. It is not likely to remain at this stage. What is needed is a new consideration of its past experience, its present and future potential. The time is ripe for such a cooperative step forward.

D. PROCEDURES

Description of Activities

In January 1989, questionnaires were sent to all public Boards of Education in Ontario responsible for secondary schools (77). Separate School Boards were excluded from the survey, on the grounds that, until the extension of the Separate Boards responsibilities to grades 11 and 12, (1985), their use of the policy was, with the exception of a very few boards, minimal. A total of 50 Boards (65%) responded.

In reply to question III.1, "Would your Board be interested in participating in the larger study?", 19 (38%) of the respondents, (25% of the total population) agreed. The 19 Boards were grouped according to: provincial region; centralization or decentralization of implementation of the practice; and total numbers of awards made in the past twelve months. Metropolitan Toronto Boards were excluded, partly because the previous project (The Impact of Older Students on Secondary Schools in Ontario:OSSTF; 1988) had permitted the development of a sense of the practices of at least two of the Boards, and because their populations were not as representative as others. Boards reporting fewer than fifty assessments in the past year were also excluded. While all of the Boards agreeing to further participation were written (See Appendix 2), five Boards were chosen initially for interviews: Brant County Board of Education, Frontenac County Board of Education, Grey County Board of Education, Kenora Board of Education, and Niagara South Board of Education. Letters were written to the designated officer at each Board (See Appendix 2). All five Boards agreed to the second round of participation. Fourteen interviews were conducted in May and June 1989 arising from the initial letters. In the case of the Kenora Board interviews were conducted by telephone. One additional interview was conducted at the Waterloo County Board of Education as a result of information gathered in the scheduled interviews.

In addition further interviews (2) were conducted with a Ministry official who was involved with the introduction of the policy in 1974, and a second official currently involved with its implementation.

E. FINDINGS

1. Interviews with Ministry of Education Officials.

The first interview (February 20, 1989) was conducted with a former member of the Ministry's "HS-1 Committee" at the time of the introduction of the policy. The respondent indicated that the perception of the need for the use of maturity credits arose from the introduction of the overall "credit" system to secondary schools as a result of the implementation of HS-1. Prior to that development a relatively small number of adult students had been admitted "without prejudice" to grades 12 and 13, and encouraged to demonstrate their abilities to cope with the academic program. The Committee was concerned that the introduction of the credit system would curtail their admission in the future. The period at which the policy was recommended was a period of high unemployment among young people, and of increasing numbers of students leaving secondary school without formal completion of their programs. A primary objective of the program was to encourage predominantly young "drop-outs" to return to school. There was no particularly strong opposition to the recommended policy, nor any noticeable influence from the mature entry provisions introduced by the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology at the time of their introduction to the provincial education system in the late nineteen sixties.

Assessment of entitlement to specific numbers of credits was recognized by the members of the committee as a "major" problem, but the required skills were assumed to lie within existing resources of educational personnel. The need for a high level of discretion at the point of the decision was emphasized; the use of formal tests was rejected in place of the use of previous school records of achievement, the age of the applicant, and evidence of "work-experience". The possibility of the applicants' "shopping around", among varying interpretations of eligibility between Boards, and between schools within Boards, was discussed, but not regarded as a serious problem. In fact, it was regarded as a positive factor by some members of the Committee.

The central feature of the implementation of the policy was that it should be devolved to Boards of Education, and preferably to school principals within those Boards. No consideration was given by the Committee at that

time to the development of special training programs, or of detailed guidelines, for those individuals who would be involved in making the individual assessments. It is not entirely clear, from the interview, or from examination of other documentation whether the policy was intended to attract young "drop-outs" to return to secondary school soon, or even immediately after they had dropped out, or whether it contained a longer term view with respect to encouraging their "eventual" return under improved opportunities for completion. It could have been argued that the "life-experience " credits in particular offered some encouragement to drop out, particularly if opportunities for employment were reasonable, and if academic success under existing circumstances seemed unlikely. However, dissemination of information about the opportunities involved remains to this day "uneven" and there is little likelihood that young people in school at the time of the introduction of policy, or on the point of dropping-out, were aware of its existence.

The second interview was with an official of a division of the Ministry with a direct interest in the implementation of the policy. The respondent confirmed the impression that there is little official concern in the Ministry with the policy at the present time. What does exist arises from a Ministry perception of an increase in applicants "shopping around" for competitive assessments, and a perceived demand for an increase in the maximum allowable maturity credits, from 12 to 15, as a result of the increase in total credits demanded for the Secondary School Diploma from 27 to 30 (OSIS). The Ministry does not collect province-wide data on the granting of maturity credits, nor is there any requirement for Boards of Education to do so. The respondent was not aware of the existence of any training programs, workshops, or other province-wide supports for individuals engaged in making assessments. It would appear that the implementation of this policy has enjoyed something of the same "benign neglect" that characterized the outlook of the Ministry to continuing education as a whole, prior to 1976.

2. The Questionnaire

Questions 1.(Name of School Board) and 2. (Number of Secondary Schools) were designed to illicit information on which to base the further choice of participants for the second round of the inquiry. Therefore they will not be reported.

Question 3. (Number of secondary students currently enrolled in CREDIT courses) and Question 4. (Number of mature students as defined by the Ministry etc.) revealed a problem that is inescapable in this type of inquiry. While students as physical presences, are not distinguished from each other for many purposes within the daily operation of a secondary school, for financial and administrative purposes, "regular" students, that is those who are attending day-time classes, frequently with students of a conventional age, are distinguished from "continuing education" students, who are almost without exception "older", and who may be attending in the day-time, in the evening, or both, on some schedule other than the conventional ones. In replying to questions 3. and 4. it was not always clear whether respondents had included " continuing education" students or not. Three Boards replied that the information was not available or too difficult to obtain. Only 1 Board indicated that they had no students in that category and awarded no maturity credits. Numbers of mature students, by definition, ranged from 1 to 2850, with an average of 231. The large numbers, 2850, 1555, 919, 730, and 500, were all reported by large Boards, and seem to have included the continuing education students. It is not clear how many of the smaller Boards did so. The total figures therefore are not accurate, and if anything are understated. However as they are, they indicate that all Boards but one are utilizing the policy, and that the numbers of students involved are considerable. Nevertheless, as evidence revealed by the interviews also indicates, the number of designated "mature" students, and the numbers applying for and being granted maturity credits is considerably less than the total of students 19+ currently enrolled in secondary schools in Ontario. That may be accounted for by the number of students in the 19, 20, and 21 age groups, who have not left school at all, or who have been away for too short a time to be eligible for any of the maturity credits. However, it is also accounted for by the numbers of older students who do not request such assessment.

Question 5. (How many equivalent-credit allowances, as defined by the Ministry, were granted in the past year, (1987-88)?). The replies to this question possibly suffer from the same ambiguity as question 4., but offer similar indications. Three Boards indicated they had granted no credits, and 7 that the figures were unavailable. For the three type of credits, ranges and averages are as follows.

Table 1

NUMBERS OF CREDITS AWARDED IN THREE CATEGORIES (1987-88)

	Range	Average
Life-Experience	2473 - 0	361
Equiv.- Ed	809 - 0	71
Apprenticeship	211 - 0	8

While we suspect that these figures are understated, the comparisons are extremely useful. While 3 Boards reported giving no life-experience credits, 11 reported awarding no equivalent-education credits, and 26 reported awarding no credits for apprenticeship programs. What may be being reflected here is evidence from other sources that the under-educated, that is those with less than grade 10 or 12 achievement, get less access to training and educational opportunities outside of formal education than those with higher levels of achievement. The fact that so many of the mature students are women, and that women get fewer opportunities for education and training associated with employment than men may also be reflected in these figures. It may also be the case, that successful apprentices, return to secondary school in smaller numbers than the general population without secondary school completion. One could speculate that the youth of the re-entrants (37% are under nineteen) means that they have had less time to complete outside courses or apprenticeship programs. However, other data, including the substantial number of life-experience credits awarded, which are only available to older students, would not seem to support that argument.

Question 6. (How many applications for equivalent credit allowances were received in a)1987-88 b)Current academic year?) provided a wide range of responses.

Table 2

NUMBERS OF APPLICATIONS FOR MATURITY CREDITS 1987-88/1988-89

	Range	Average
1987-88	1223 - 1	118
1988-89	1037 - 2	111

Two Boards reported no awards in either year, 5 that the data were not available. Twenty-four Boards reported fewer awards in 1988-89 than in the previous year, though in each case they took pains to indicate that the year was not yet complete. We suspect that in this case, again, numbers are understated. The interviews, which took place two to three months later in the year than the questionnaire, suggest an increase in the number of awards between 1987-88 and 1988-89, and over the past four or five years.

The replies to Question 7. (Does the Board maintain central records (eg. statistics) that distinguish between mature and regular (adolescent) credit students?) confirmed our experience in the problems associated with gathering this information. Nine Boards indicated that they do keep separate records, but some of these indicated that the distinction was between regular and continuing education students; 6 Boards did not respond or indicated that such information was retrievable; the remaining 35 respondents do not maintain central records on that basis.

The questions in Part 11 of the questionnaire were directed towards obtaining information on the procedures associated with the granting of maturity credits.

Table 3. (PART 11 QUES. 1) *

TIME AT WHICH APPLICATION FOR EQUIVALENT CREDITS IS MADE

PRIOR TO ADMISSSION	10
ON ADMISSION	9
AFTER COMPLETING REQ. COURSES	5
AT ANY TIME IN PROGRAM	21
OTHER (COMBINATION OF ABOVE)	8
NO RESPONSE	1

Table 4. (PART 11 QUES 2.)*

REQUIRED PROCEDURES FOR MAKING APPLICATION

WRITTEN APPLICATION	9
VERBAL REQUEST	4
SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE OF PRIOR LEARNING	3
COMBINATION OF ABOVE	35
OTHER (Includes supporting documentation with written or verbal request)	3

Table 5 (PART 11 QUES. 3)*

PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSESSMENT AND DECISION

DESIGNATED BOARD STAFF MEMBER	3
COMMITTEE OF BOARD STAFF	2
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OR DESIGNATE	31
COMMITTEE OF SCHOOL STAFF	12
OTHER (Includes several patterns; Board staff initially, final decision by principal; principal and guidance teacher; guidance teacher only.)	6

Table 6 (PART 11 QUES 4) *

MECHANISMS USED FOR ASSESSMENT.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW	35
ORAL TEST/EXAMINATION	0
WRITTEN TEST/EXAMINATION	0
INTUITION (EXPERIENCE OF ASSESSOR)	3
OTHER (Includes combination of interview + intuition; in one case interview + written examination)	16

*Totals come to more than 50 in all cases, because practices differ between schools within single jurisdictions.

Clearly, the delegation of the responsibility for assessment to Boards, and in most cases to schools, has resulted in considerable variation in procedures and by inference in the bases for the judgements. There was some further evidence in the responses that the procedures within Boards vary depending upon what category the student occupies - day-school, continuing education/evening, or Ontario Basic Skills credit program.

The variations reflected in Tables 3, 4, and 6 suggests the existence of some incentives for "shopping around" if the applicant was aware of the differences in practice. There is some evidence in the interviews,that where that awareness is most likely, that is where differences exist between schools in the same jurisdiction, that is the result, though only in a very few cases. However, there is very little evidence to be found with respect to applicants knowing about, and being able or willing to shop among different Boards.

Table 5 suggests the presence of some obstacles facing an applicant with respect to knowing for sure who has made the final decision, and where the final authority actually rests. Again the interviews reveal that the likelihood of an applicant challenging the decision is, so far in the history of the program, very slight.

The question arising, and to which the analysis of the interview material will be chiefly directed is threefold. Do the procedures and the numbers revealed by the responses to the questionnaire suggest that the policy has lived up to its promise in the sense that it is made use of by sufficient numbers of the target population; that it is fairly administered, in the sense that applicants have a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their eligibility for awards; and conversely there is no serious evidence that the integrity or quality of the secondary school diploma is being adulterated or being rendered useless.

3. Field Interviews with Responsible Implementors

Five Boards were selected from the 19 that indicated their willingness to take part in the second round of the inquiry. An additional Board was included as a result of material emerging from the interviews.

Table 7

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED BOARDS

	Region	Sec/Schools	FTE'S	Mat.Studs	Equivs.	Applications 87/88	88/89
Board	NW	1	945	87	138	355	311
Board 2	W	8	4907	125	182	91	94
Board 3	SW	6	5889	NA	NA	NA	NA
Board 4	E	8	6237	700	2232	400	500
Board 5	SW	15	NA	650	1350	1000	1000
Board 6	W	16	18633	1120	2171	1223	1037

*Not available

The interview schedule (see appendix 4) contained 6 sections, a total of 24 questions, and involved between an hour and an hour and half to complete.

a) General Characteristics

Consistent with the questionnaire responses (Table 1), interviewees indicated that applications for equivalent credits have been increasing steadily over the past five years, though for two, the number have been the same for approximately three years. All but two Boards reported that the majority of applicants are in the 25-40 age range. The exceptions reported most applicants under 21 years and in one case, the provincially supported "Futures Program", with its "part-time, part-time" provisions was being more heavily utilized than in the other jurisdiction included in the interviews. Women outnumber men by more than three to one, and do so at all three stages. For example more women than men enquire or apply; more actually enter the programs, and more complete them. All three types of equivalent credits are granted regularly by these Boards, but maturity or life experience credits outnumber the other two types in every case, and in one case by as much as fifteen to one.

While most of the Boards can identify examples of the implementation of the policy within a few years of its introduction, there has been a sharp increase since 1983-84. This is attributed to the steady increase in the provision of facilities for adults, such as special adult classes, and special adult schools or centers. Second, some Boards have become more entrepreneurial during the eighties in "tendering " for program support to local agencies, and attracting adult students directly. Third, there was a sharp increase in applications for some Boards at the time of the introduction of OSIS, and the increase in total credits for the diploma from 27 to 30. At the same time, it seems apparent, that information supplied by the Ministry on a province-wide basis, such as the distribution of the pamphlet entitled "Credit for the School of Hard Knocks", has reached a range of community agencies, and increased the likelihood of adults making application to Boards on their own.

b) Characteristics of Board Policy - Time of Award - Refusals etc.

Board policies with respect to granting equivalent credits demonstrate varying stages of development. Four of the Boards have developed Board-wide policies, three of them written, and publicly available. Two retain wide discretion on the part of individual school principals; in one Board the entire process is centralized in one person. The developing pattern is one of

allocating the authority over day-school applicants to the specific school and principal, and centralizing the handling of continuing education students. However, the growth of "shopping" on the part of applicants among schools within a single Board, and the resulting apparent duplication of the work of assessors, has lead at least one additional Board to increased centralization of the procedure. In contrast, another Board, faced with similar circumstances, has retained a dispersion of authority, but increased consistency by creating a committee of assessors, under the chairmanship of a principal, which regularly compares assesements and revises the written policy. It does appear that the increasing numbers of adult day students within all Boards is stimulating a greater coordination if not centralization of practice. Therefore while policies of implementation between Boards in the Province remain divergent, the development of consistency within their jurisdictions is steadily increasing.

There is no better example of divergency throughout the province than with respect to the point in the procedure at which formal acknowledgement is made of the award of the credits. The practice ranges from the one Board that makes the award formally immediately upon completing the assessment, through two Boards that require the completion of one senior course, two Boards that require completion of the entire program, and one Board that requires completion of four senior courses, before any equivalent credits are formally awarded. However, all Boards provide the applicant with a "legal document", immediately upon completion of the assessment, which indicates what equivalent credits will be awarded upon the fulfillment of which specific conditions.

Germane to this matter is the question of re-assessment. One Board is firm in its refusal to allow more than one assessment, though it is willing to alter an assessment upon provision of information that could have been available at the time of the original assessment. Information pertaining to any developments since the original assessment and entrance to the program will not be considered. Other Boards are more flexible, permitting consideration of additional external courses, taken since the first assessment. One interviewee is considering the inclusion of the years since the applicant began a part-time program as legitimate in the "life-experience" category, since the duration is calculated in terms of departure from the original school.

All respondents indicated that rarely is an applicant refused credit entirely. The absence of proper information (see Section C) can delay the procedure, but in almost every case, an eligible applicant receives something. The attitude prevailing among the interviewees is that it is the job of the Board to be of assistance to the applicant in every possible way, that is that the Board's mission is to facilitate the education of all citizens, as distinct from judging or merely evaluating them. On the other hand, all respondents indicated a concern, both on their parts, as well as on the part of the applicants, that there be no misrepresentation or "giveaways". They emphasized their concern that there should be no appearance or reality of the weakening of the quality of the secondary school diploma.

In this context Boards are remarkably uniform, both internally and externally, in their response to applicants under twenty-one years of age who, in their opinion, have not been out of school long enough to acquire the maturity in attitude, motivation, and self-discipline, that characterizes their older counterparts. Other research (see OSSTF; 1988) confirms this attitude. Few, if any , from among the under-twenty-ones have undertaken external courses, or have qualified under apprenticeship programs. Most of the Boards interviewed indicated a reluctance to provide an assessment at all, until the applicants have displayed their seriousness by successfully completing more than one course, and to award more than the minimum number of maturity credits. On the other hand, it appears, that members of this group of applicants are the most aggressive in their claims for maturity credits, do the most shopping around, where that is possible, and are the most likely to fail to complete their programs - again. The exception appears to be with respect to those who are enrolled in the "Futures Program", a matter that deserves further exploration. It does appear that the equivalence program is of the most benefit to those individuals who have learned some things that cannot be taught. Presumably that is one other reason why the maturity credits play so central a role.

c) Process - Information Required - Reporting of Equivalents

Procedures for assessing applicants vary widely from Board to Board with the exception of the nearly universal use of the interview. Four of the six Boards advertise the availability of equivalent credits regularly, on the radio, in local newspapers, and by means of special brochures. Two Boards depend on Ministry brochures, local agency referrals, and other means of

information distribution. One responsible official has distributed over 1500 business cards this year. All Boards find that "word-of-mouth" is a vital factor. In the case of one Board, application for an assessment may not be made until after the applicant has registered for a class. Three of the Boards make special presentations about equivalent credits to adult classes. It is at this point we find distinctions in the treatment of adult day students and continuing education students. In one case the continuing education students do not receive an interview.

Four of the Boards have special application forms, and all Boards have a special form for the calculation and reporting of equivalent credits awarded.

In every case, with the exception reported of some continuing education students, the interview is central to the process. Interviews vary in length from twenty minutes to an hour, the average being about thirty minutes. During that time, in most Boards, essential personal information is sought, seriousness of purpose and reality of expectations estimated, and an entire program is planned for the individual. The form on which the total credits, those already earned, those granted as equivalents, and those needed are recorded, is completed jointly by assessor and applicant. When the process is completed, copies of this legal document are sent to the applicant and included in his or her file. It would be impossible to overestimate the significance of the interview as the basis for the assessment, and as an example of the discretion of the assessor, and the skills of assessment involved.

The information required from the applicant includes; transcripts of previous academic achievement; certificates from "the bedroom wall" indicating achievement in external courses; records of employment, including T-4 slips and letters from employers, especially in the case of younger applicants. While some assessors report examining the content of the employment - e.g. supervisory experience, tasks requiring mathematical or technical skills - most seem interested in evidence of stability of employment and a record of responsibility. There is some division of opinion regarding domestic experience and the raising of children. For some, the existence of one or more children of particular ages is sufficient evidence of maturity. Others probe more specifically for evidence of what has been learned, and for details of voluntary or community work outside the home.

What is evident here is a two step process. The applicant is reached initially by external advertising or other sources of information, or, by information received in class. Many telephone the school for information. All of the respondents believe that the original initiative takes courage and determination on the part of the applicant, and that an immediate, positive response is imperative. A great deal of attention is paid to the training of receptionists, and to the physical environment first encountered by the applicant. A great deal of effort is made to make the process as fast and supportive for the applicant, as possible. Depending upon the availability of formal records, the entire process can be completed in as short a time as two weeks. Delays are otherwise the result of too few staff members available for assessing, and an official underestimate of the amount of time the process requires.

What is of critical importance is the combination of assessing and program planning. While the number of credits awarded seems only indirectly related to the program to be followed, there can be little doubt that the likelihood of the applicant completing the planned program is directly dependent upon the coalescence of the two functions.

Maturity credits are recorded as such, in a lump sum on the student's transcript. Most respondents were not sure how the other two classes of equivalent credits were recorded. Three of the Boards indicated that they have had some queries from employers regarding the meaning of the maturity credits, 3 reported no such enquiries. One respondent expressed exasperation over the failure of employers to bother going beyond the diploma. Several Boards indicated a belief that employers are likely to become more interested in the details of graduate's programs, particularly with the introduction of a single diploma. They pointed to the fact that other educational providing agencies, particularly Colleges, are concerned with the specific courses taken, and therefore inclined to discount the undesignated maturity credits.

d) Personnel - Training of Personnel - Types of Judgements - Attitudes of Applicants - Problems

Patterns of management of the assessment of applicants for equivalent credits varies from Board to Board. In most cases authority is distributed among secondary school principals, though the actual assessment is done by guidance personnel, with some concentration in the continuing

education unit. In the other extreme, authority is concentrated in one individual to whom all applications to that particular Board must be made. Officers involved include principals, vice-principals, a Principal of Community Education, heads of student services, and individual counselors.

What seems to be occurring is an increasing centralization both in terms of all assessment being in the hands of one counselor in one school, or the gradual transfer of all such assessing to the continuing education unit, where a group of staff members may be involved. One respondent pointed out the necessity of separating the assessing and program planning function of the counselor, an essentially cooperative and supportive role, from the final authority for assigning credits, which is basically judgemental. For that reason the final authority for the decision should be lodged, at least, at the rank of principal.

None of the individuals interviewed has received any formal training specific to the task of assessment. All have learned the job from an informal apprenticeship to the previous incumbent. While all of them indicate that they like the tasks involved, for none is it a full-time job. Everywhere the tasks are combined with regular counselling, or other administrative duties. In one case, responsibilities are divided between assessing/program planning, and the administration of the cooperative education program. Most respondents believe that the time required for proper assessing, particularly the demands of the interview, are seriously underestimated by the administration. In turn, it appears that the administrations have difficulty in both defining and funding the positions.

Nowhere could we find evidence of formal evaluation of the work of the individuals involved. There are, in most, but not all, cases, built-in checks and balances, in the sense that counselors doing the assessments, must refer to principals, or comparable officers for final authority. Most respondents indicated that their recommendations were rarely turned down, but that they valued the discussions involved. One Board has developed a complex, but apparently self evaluating system, whereby the interviewing and program planning are done cooperatively by counselor and applicant, while the final assessment is done by the senior officer of the unit, frequently involving multiple exchanges between the officer, the counselor and the

applicant. The constant concern repeated by the respondents was the need to balance fairness and support for the applicant, and the integrity of the program. "Are we being too generous, too harsh?" None believed that the task was impossible or undesirable, but all expressed a wish for more consultation and mutual support. The highest degree of satisfaction in that area, was reported by individuals at the Board that maintains the Board-wide committee of assessors and reviews and revises it procedures on a regular basis.

Our question with respect to required professional development was directed to determining if the necessary skills could be acquired by specific opportunities within teaching and/or educational administration, and its related development opportunities, or whether they could be best acquired outside of education. Opinions were divided. The almost universal professional background of the respondents is in Guidance and Counselling or Special Education or both. Yet none were convinced that either or both of these could be considered sufficient. Almost all of the interviewees pointed to particular experience within education - coaching and other extra-curricular activities, work with troubled young people, and administration. At the same time, nearly all have worked outside of education at varying times and in various jobs - manufacturing, bar-tending, sales etc., or in other educational agencies such as Colleges and/or universities, or in various voluntary roles in their communities. All argued for the significance of those experiences in performing the assessment tasks adequately. They insisted that not every educator could perform the tasks; that maturity and experience was essential; and that knowledge of the local community and of the enormous potential for learning outside of school were critical assets. None could recommend any single formal or informal path to the adequate performance of these skills, but all indicated that they would welcome more formal and informal consultation of a "workshop" character, both within their own Boards, and more important, province-wide.

The intensely local character of the assessment process is a prominent factor. All of the respondents, in commenting on the nature of the task, reflected the need for personal and contextual knowledge of the individual applicant. They acquire information about age, marital and parental status, employment records, and community activities, much of it dependent for accurate assessment upon a knowledge of the community environment. The stated formula for assessment, two credits for each year out of school, is

applied to varying degrees. One Board allows only one credit per year, others lean towards two, but there is always a considerable element of judgement and discretion involved. As stated earlier, there is a tendency to award fewer credits per year to the young compared with awards for individuals who have been ten or more years out of school. Respondents reported a continuous challenge in defeating the reticence of most applicants in revealing their accomplishments. A great deal of the judgement is demanded by the program planning phase of the exchange, for example in encouraging participation in courses that the applicant can succeed at, at least in the initial stages; and in helping the applicant distinguish between needed skills and the completion of courses. What seems to be required in these roles is a combination of interviewing and negotiating skills; considerable knowledge of the formal educational credit system; and sensitivity to the confidence, aspirations, and potential of the applicant. Occasionally the interview results in the applicant being directed elsewhere than to a secondary school program.

It is difficult to identify a comparable role elsewhere in the society, though the particular sets of skills involved can be described. Certainly there appears to be no comparable role within the educational system in the sense that all teaching, or all administration shares some common characteristics.

Recipients of equivalent credits, particularly that overwhelming majority who benefit from maturity credits are almost universally grateful. Most did not, or do not appear to know of the availability of equivalent credits before entering the program. While one Board will make the assessment and grant the credits without evidence of intent to pursue a program, most will not grant credits without further successful participation, and one will not consider an application until after the candidate has indicated an intention to enter the program. Therefore, so far in the history of the program, the availability of equivalent credits seems to have played a minor role in incentive to enter a program. The gratitude is perhaps more understandable under those circumstances. Most are apologetic for having failed to complete their programs as young people, and exhibit a strong need to explain. Most are lacking in confidence, and extremely appreciative of the assessment and its associated counselling. Only among the young have some, and then not very many, assessors encountered an assertion of rights, occasionally amounting to belligerence. Occasionally, recipients of awards compare their results, and one will complain about unequal treatment.

However, these, so far, appear to be minor problems, and there is no evidence among these respondents of experience of threats to seek out a trustee, or even to undertake litigation.

Difficulties reported by the interviewees are of three principal kinds - procedural, regulatory, and qualitative.

Procedural difficulties are concentrated on problems presented by student records, Foreign applicants top the list, for obvious reasons. The Ministry Translation Services were mentioned frequently as a source of assistance. Second in order are other provinces, where sometimes long delays are experienced. The development of new, more easily interpreted student records was mentioned with enthusiasm. There are some differences in practice with respect to who is or should be responsible for getting the required documents. In most cases it is the applicants themselves who are required to assume the responsibility, though there seem to be some differences in treatment of continuing education students and adult day-students. Even in the cases where students are responsible, considerable time is frequently required in advising them where to look. There seems no easy solution to these problems other than to simplify documents as much as possible where that lies within the province's control.

A problem that remains minor, but was frequently mentioned, is that of honouring the awards of other Boards and agencies in the province. So far the traffic has not been very great. Applicants may occasionally shop within Board jurisdictions, but there is little evidence of shopping between Boards. The major exception to the pattern of inter-Board commmerce lies with the awards granted by the provincial Independent Learning Center. The Center apparently relies upon the automatic, and literal application of the "two credits for every year out of school" formula, and these awards are frequently presented to Boards to honour. For reasons already stated, this application conflicts frequently with the methods of award used by all of the Boards interviewed. The position of the Center, and its distance from environmental and personal information that plays so substantial a role in decisions by regional Boards, makes clear the reason for the automatic application, but the results are providing increasing difficulties for Boards. Perhaps the Center is playing the role of "court of appeal" or at least competitor with respect to the Boards, not a totally undesirable function. If that is the case, then some greater province-wide discussion and understanding would be helpful for all concerned.

A final difficulty in this area lies with a problem already under discussion elsewhere, for example The Select Committee on Education. Individuals can, in Ontario, obtain admission to a regional College of Applied Arts and Technology under a mature student admission policy, and pursue what the College may designate as a Secondary School Diploma Equivalent Program - or something of that sort. For understandable reasons, they are surprised when, upon application for a required Secondary School Diploma, or at the least an advanced standing in the program, they are refused. The need to refer to the Board at all, is evidence of the independence of the Diploma in the eyes of the community, an independence that the government would be extremely unwise to abandon without serious consideration. On the other hand, it does not seem reasonable to mislead the student, or to make his or her life more complicated than necessary.

The second area of difficulty lies with the present substance of the policy, as it works out in practice. The respondents indicated that the optimum benefit is obtained by the applicant who has left school more than six years ago, after completing Grade 10. In this case, the application of the maximum maturity credits (12) and the obligation to complete four additional senior course, regardless of prior accomplishment, fit together precisely. For those with less previous academic achievement, or those with more, the fit is not so good. The tendency to wish to provide more for longer periods away from school, and rich employment and community experience, can only be met by reducing the automatic application of the formula to younger and less experienced applicants. It would appear that this is what is happening, a not unexpected development among responsible individuals wishing above all to be fair. A second problem lies with the variation in applicant experience and aspiration, which means that the completion of four existing senior course, while making up the required credit total, will not be as efficacious for the individual, as undertaking an intermediate course in a subject area that is more relevant to occupational ambitions. This presumably is what our respondent meant in referring to the errors of confusing skills and credits. Some adjustment in this area is possible, and more "loopholes" are being explored. Some official attention and discussion would appear to be necessary.

Finally, there is the abiding aspiration among all of our respondents to be "fair". We have already reported the prevailing attitude of support for the

applicants in pursuing their goals, the predominant of which is obtaining a diploma. Set against that objective is another dimension of "fairness". In this case the concern to be fair is in not misleading the applicant with respect to his or her potential or actual achievement in terms of future demands outside the school system. Finally there is the concern to be fair to the system, by not, in any way, discounting or adulterating either the appearance or the reality of the integrity of the secondary school system and its symbols of achievement. These are, of course, professional attitudes, that one might have a right to expect from this group of individuals. But they are being tested in relatively unfamiliar territory, in the milieu of real individuals needing support and advice, and the absence of a clear professional history and identity, the presence of large groups of colleagues with similar experience, and of much system direction. There is no single answer to the final problem, except the wider utilization of the considerable experience that has now been developed in the province, with the purpose of enlarging systematically on that experience, and developing some new canons of theory and procedure.

e) Opinions of the Policy - Advantages - Improvements.

Our interviewees were unanimous in their support for the policy of granting equivalent credits. Without it, the majority of adult students would not undertake or complete programs towards the diploma. In the words of one respondent, to abandon the practice would return the school system to the condition of permanent "drop-outs". The present system encourages the reentrant by the mere process of awarding equivalents, and by allowing an imaginable time for completion. Of equal interest is the opinion on the part of some of the respondents, that contrary to the fear of adulteration, the awarding of equivalent credits strengthens the importance of the diploma. The implication is that what is learned outside the educational system, over a reasonable period of years and through the assumption of ordinary adult responsibilities, is at least equal to what would have been learned earlier, chiefly in Grades 9 and 10, and perhaps, superior. They were also unanimous in their belief that the presence of adults in school, day and evening, strengthened the teaching enterprise for everyone, and contributed to the improvement of relationships between the schools and the community. They also believed that that attitude was shared by the majority of their colleagues, an opinion for which support can be found in other research. (see OSSTF:1988)

With respect to improvements, the interviewees were nearly as equally unanimous in believing that they need more accurate job descriptions, and more support from the administration. One respondent argued that, in turn, the Board needed more support, in the form of some financial incentive, from the Ministry. Second they agreed on the need for more consistency in judgements across the province, but disagreed on how that might be best accomplished. The smaller number want clearer regulations from the Ministry with respect to the application of assessments. The larger group prefer the widest possible discretion at the Board and principal level, with guidelines and procedures developed by provincial consultation and professional development.

There is evidence of mixed experience in the transition to OSIS and the new credit levels. Most respondents believe that the transition is being made without undue hardship, but a few believe that all of the adults in the program should have been "grandparented". There is little agreement with respect to the increase in maturity credits to 15, or half of the required number. Most believe they should remain the same, with one suggestion of an increase to 14. One respondent pointed out that, if all the other regulations remain the same, then only a few would benefit from the increase anyway.

Independent of all other factors there is unanimous interest in the development of mechanisms for increased sharing of experience across the province, and increased exchange with the Ministry with respect to the future of the program.

f) Research - Refusals - Errors

Our concern in this section was with the respondents, and their Boards, interest in ongoing evaluation of the policy as it is implemented. Since a Diploma is, in effect, a promise of future performance, we were interested in the existence of "tracking " of students who had been awarded equivalent credits, in terms of their finishing their programs, and in terms of their subsequent achievements, educational and otherwise. None of the Boards involved in the interviews has collected or is collecting systematically, information of this kind. Neither is anyone else in the province, to our knowledge. Some of the Boards in the sample have laid the foundations for such collection - one has the graduates on record - but there has been little

attempt, so far, to engage in such an inquiry. In contrast, there is a good deal of informal information collected, particularly where circumstances permit, such as in the system with only one school, or in the schools themselves. One Board reported that the bulk of the applicants failed to finish their programs, adding that the largest proportion of these are from the under-twenty group. Three of the Boards reported,in contrast, that most of their applicants did finish their programs and obtain their diplomas. There is considerable interest in such information, but little time or opportunity to pursue it. All of the respondents would welcome an evaluation.

We asked about the occurrence of adult students, who when offered an assessment for equivalent awards refused them. We were interested in the degree to which the concern for integrity can be found among adult students themselves, in the sense that they wish to complete the same program as they abandoned earlier, or as their children had completed. Two interviewees replied that they had never encountered such students, while the others acknowledged them. One pointed out that occasionally the refusal stems from the need for specific, designated, courses in the pursuit of particular educational or employment goals.

Finally we asked our respondents if they had ever become aware of having made a major mistake in assessment, and if so, what they did about it. All acknowledged the potential and actuality of errors in judgement, but did not believe they were very frequent, or perhaps that they were frequently claimed. Several indicated that the need for consultation between assessor and principal in their setting reduced the likelihood of error. Respondents from the Board where regular consultation takes place among the assessors in different schools indicated that there had been a reduction in divergent assessments as a result of such consultations, which frequently involved simulation. One respondent indicated the willingness to repeat an assessment if information becomes available that could have been available at the time of the original assessment.

Abstract

An Evaluation of the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy

In response to the increasing numbers of adults who are returning to secondary school to complete their education, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed policies which allowed adults to return to school and facilitated their return by allowing the awarding of academic standing for learning and experience acquired outside traditional educational settings. The policies are guidelines which permit considerable discretion on the part of School Boards, and through their agents, the principals of each school and informally collected evidence suggests wide disparity in the application of this policy in Ontario. To-date no research has examined the practices associated with the implementation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy in Ontario.

This study examines and evaluates how Boards and principals have implemented, within their jurisdictions, the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy and will determine the extent to which students are applying and receiving academic credit under the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy; describe the practices school boards and principals use to examine, assess and award credit, identify the areas of difficulty schools and principals encounter in carrying out the policy; and will ascertain the perceived value of the Policy for returning adults and their schools.

The evaluation model of the Centre for Study of Evaluation (CSE) concerned with investigating programs already underway will be applied to focus upon the manner in which the Policy is being implemented in the schools. Each board will receive a Policy questionnaire and principals within Boards will be sampled and will receive a Practices questionnaire. This questionnaire will inquire into specific practices, perceptions, and problems principals encounter as the implementers of the Policy. A subsample of respondents will be interviewed. Quantitative and qualitative techniques will be used to increase the validity of the evaluation and the multimethod approach will allow for the assembling of data from multiple sources.

It is expected that findings from the study will provide valuable information to evaluate how the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy is being implemented in the Province and will identify difficulties being encountered by the Boards and principals charged with carrying out the Policy.

An Evaluation of the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy

Objectives

Increasing numbers of adults are returning to secondary school to complete their previously interrupted education (Lenox and Merriam, 1979). The reasons for these students electing to resume their studies vary (Edwards, 1979) as do the reasons that school boards make available resources to allow adult students to return to school (Rachlis, 1982).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (1984), consistent with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States, has developed policies which allow older students to return to school and facilitates their return by allowing the awarding of academic standing for learning and experience acquired outside traditional educational settings. These policies allow for the granting of academic credit towards the secondary school diploma for general experience, equivalent education, and apprenticeship-training experience.

The policies are guidelines which permit considerable discretion on the part of School Boards, and through their agents, the principals of each school. Informally collected and presented evidence suggests that there is wide disparity in the application of this policy in Ontario (Wilson, 1987). While recent work has examined the number of returning adults through a provincial-wide survey (Rachlis, 1982) and a case study of the impact of adults upon a single Toronto school (Rachlis, 1980/1981), to-date no research has examined the practices associated with the implementation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy in Ontario. Thus, we know virtually nothing about how this potentially valuable policy, designed to facilitate and reward adult students for a decision to complete their education, has been carried out, the problems that may have encountered by Boards and principals, and the benefits (or costs) that may be accruing to students and their schools. This study therefore examines and evaluates how Boards and principals have implemented, within their jurisdictions, the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy.

The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the extent to which students are applying and receiving academic credit under the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy.
2. Describe the practices school boards and principals use to examine, assess and award credit under the Program.
3. Examine the skills required for assessment and how they are developed.
4. Identify the areas of difficulty schools and principals encounter in carrying out the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy.
5. Ascertain the perceived value of the Policy for returning adults and their schools.

Summary Review of the Literature and Background of the Problem

Three main themes inform the proposed evaluation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy: a) the increasing number of adults returning to complete their interrupted education, b) the assessment of learning acquired outside of traditional educational settings, c) the formulation of the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy.

Adults Returning to Secondary School

Adults, over the past decade have been returning to secondary schools in Ontario in steadily increasing numbers (Rachlis, 1982). The most recent report from the Ontario Ministry of Education (Secondary School Enrollment by Age and Sex, 1986) indicates that in 1986 there were 16,133 students over 22 years of age, or 3.1% of the total student body, enrolled in public school credit programs. The corresponding figures for Roman Catholic Secondary schools were only 3% or 289 of the total

...ollmen. Overall these numbers represented an 8.5% increase over 1985. The increase over the past decade has been 550%.

In the United States, the practice of encouraging older students to return to school is well-rooted and enjoys strong coverage in both the scholarly and popular press (Denner, 1974; Griffith, 1975; Kimmel, 1983; Nations Schools and Colleges 1974; Roth, 1976). Additionally, a number of evaluations of the impacts of these adult education programs have been have been undertaken and published (e.g. Londoner, 1972; Kraus and Northwick, 1975).

In Canada however, the practice is less-well developed. A number of Provinces have no policies providing for the adult who returns to school (Rachlis, 1982) and it is frequently left to the popular press to educate the public through such stories as as *Back-to-School Moms* (Corner, 1987). These popular articles may be quite influential in shaping the public perception of these activities (Crawford, 1979; Parry Sound North Star, March 9, 1978; McFall, 1981).

The reasons why students return to school vary (Rachlis, 1982). These may include increasing competition for jobs (Cross, 1979), increased leisure time (Goodspeed, 1981), desire to complete an interrupted education (McFall, 1981), personal growth (Kasten, 1976) or desire for a career once children have been raised (Corner, 1987).

Since returning to school for these older students is frequently both a difficult psychological task as well as one requiring some economic sacrifice, policy makers have tried to establish practices which facilitate the re-entry of these adults to the school system. One important practice takes into account the reality of adults having had learning experiences during their non-school lives and involves assessment of and providing credit for various non-academic learning. The next section examines recent development in the assessing of and awarding of academic credit for these kinds of experiential learning.

The Assessing of Non-Traditional Learning

Adults returning to school bring with them various experiences which possibly could be applied against the requirements for diplomas or certificates (Davis & Knapp, 1978; Houle, 1976). Thus non-traditional learning covers knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification. It can also include instruction-based learning provided by any institution which has not been examined in any of the public examinations system (Further Education Unit, 1987).

Evidence collected from the United Kingdom and the United States (Houle, 1976) suggest that granting educational equivalents hold promise for attracting many students to complete their education at the secondary school level. Though most of the work has been conducted at the post-secondary levels (MacTaggart, 1979; Stanley, 1980; Stephens Colleges Without Walls, 1977; Trivett, 1975), numerous U.S. publications (Nickse, 1975; Krause and Northwick, 1975) have provided some data documenting the extent of these practices at the secondary school level. These studies provide evidence that a variety of goals are met by providing for adults to return to school including providing for the effects of declining enrollments (Anderson, 1977; Rachlis, 1982), improving literacy levels of adults (Roth, 1976), providing personal fulfillment (Houle, 1976) and allowing women to resume education interrupted by domestic activity (Corner, 1987).

The learning that principals *could* accept as prior or experiential learning include the taking into account of age and varied experience of the applicant, courses taking during military service or employment, apprenticeship training etc. and the procedures used to assess the value of the learning *could* include interviews, preparation of portfolios, letters of reference, review of courses, etc. We do not know however, what principals consider as constituting adult learning nor the means they used to assess this experience. The study then, would not only identify current practices but could identify

areas in which Boards and principals could benefit from information and assistance. Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of Education would be provided with potentially useful information detailing aspects of Province-wide implementation of the Mature Students Policy.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984) developed the Ontario Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy which explicitly acknowledges the validity of adults' non-academic learning experiences and makes provision for the awarding of credit towards the secondary school diploma.

Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy

As described in the *Program and Diploma Requirements* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984) the Policy allows principals of schools to award, in addition to diploma credits already accumulated by students, up to 26 (of 30 required) for experience in three categories. A *maturity allowance* allows up to 12 credits on the basis of age and length of time out of school. An *equivalent-education allowance* can be given for individual courses successfully completed. And an *apprenticeship-training allowance* allows credits to be awarded for completion of periods of apprenticeship-training programs. Students are required to complete at least four Senior Level courses as the maximum number of credits that can be awarded is 26.

But while this policy has been in place for 13 years, having been instituted in 1974, little is known about the manner in which it is implemented in schools, the degree to which students apply for credits under the program, the problems school boards and principals encounter, and its impact, both positive and negative upon returning adult students. The proposed evaluation study deals with these issues.

Scholarly/Educational/Social Significance

The study examines the problems arising from boards and principals' attempts to implement a central Ministry policy related to adult education. The procedures adopted by particularly active boards will be evaluated with a view to the producing of guidebooks for other principals in the Province which perceive a need for such guidance.

The reasons for adults returning to school are many but include goals which appear to be directly related to perceived societal needs: improving literacy, increasing job skills, promoting personal fulfillment and supporting greater equality of occupational opportunity. The value of the Policy will be enhanced once we have examined its implementation and can suggest areas of needed improvement.

Design and Methodology

The evaluation approach of the Centre for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) (Morris and Fitz-Gibbon, 1978), takes into account both the procedures by which programs should be evaluated but also the specific period of development of the program when the evaluation is undertaken. Additionally, the CSE model incorporates, within a single process, many aspects of Bloom's Goal-Oriented (Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus, 1981) Stufflebeam's (1971) Decision-Making, and Scriven's (1974) Goal-Free evaluation approaches.

Ideally, an evaluator should be involved in the initial development of a program and be able to help determine objectives and goals prior to attempting the evaluation. Frequently, this is not the case. Evaluators instead are presented with questions which inquire into varying issues based upon when in the sequence of a program's development these questions arise. Inquiries about what should be done to deal with or even identify problems usually require a needs assessment. When questions are raised about whether a program is meeting its goals, the evaluator is really being asked to help clarify a program's goals and then match up outcomes with these goals. Questions concerned with how a program can be improved require a formative evaluation while questions of whether a program should

be continued demand a summative evaluation

The questions we are concerned with appear similar to those outlined by the CSE for investigating programs already underway and include *What is happening in the program, What does it look like? What do people experience?, and How much does it vary from site to site?* According to the CSE model we are investigating program implementation, also known as description of program implementation, program documentation, or evaluation of program processes. While we certainly don't intend to ignore issues of program goals and program improvement, or problems and recommendations, the prime focus of the present study is upon program implementation.

Design

Since it can be expected that school boards have amplified upon the policy guidelines outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards will be the primary unit of measurement. Each board will receive a Policy questionnaire which will inquire into the board's role in implementing the Mature Student Policy of the Ministry. Since principals appear charged with primary responsibility for implementation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy, principals within Board will be sampled and will receive a Practice questionnaire. This questionnaire will inquire into specific practices, perceptions, and problems principals encounter as the implementers of the Policy. A subsample of respondents will be interviewed.

Since a reliance on only one research technique presents major threats to the validity of outcomes (Haser, 1980), the present study will employ both quantitative and qualitative techniques to increase validity in the evaluation of the implementation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy in Ontario.

Quantitative Study. Quantitative data collection will allow for the detailed description of many aspects of the implementation of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy. Questionnaires completed by Board personnel and a sample of principals will provide details concerning the number of students applying for credit under this policy, procedures used to assess and award credits, and problems encountered in the process of implementing the program. Appendix I contains a draft of the Board-Level Questionnaire.

Qualitative Study. Qualitative data collection methods depend upon intensive study of a few individuals from which categories of meaning can emerge. The use of in-depth interviews of a subsample of Board personnel and principals will provide insights into unexpected outcomes of the Policy as well as problems principals face in following out the policy. The interviewees chosen will reflect Boards and Schools identified as particularly active or non-active in implementing the Policy based upon responses from the questionnaire study. The draft version of the Board questionnaire will be modified to produce a Principal's practice questionnaire.

In essence then, the multimethod approach will allow for the assembling of data using the principle of "triangulation" (Webb, 1966) involving the assembling of multiple data sources and assessing the consistency of findings.

Key informant interviews. As part of another study Ontario Ministry of Education personnel directly concerned with the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy are being interviewed and will provide information concerning Ministry perceptions of many aspects of the Equivalent Standing for Mature Students Policy (Thomas, 1987).

Data Analysis Procedures

Since the quantitative study is primarily descriptive, focus will be upon presentation of frequencies and crosstabulations of findings by geographical region, board size, school size, principal experience etc. More detailed study involving factor analysis (Harman, 1976) and dual scaling (Nishisato and Nishisato, 1984) of the questionnaire responses will provide exploratory hypotheses concerning the structure of practices across the province.

The qualitative study involving interviews will provide detailed case studies of exemplary board and school practices and will be organized along the dimensions of Practices, Procedures, Students, Attitudes, and Projections. It is expected that the data from each component of the study will provide cross-validation of findings.

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The Ontario Institute for Studies in Educat
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6 Tel. 923-6641
Department of Adult Education

January 30, 1989

Dear Director:

Recently, I was awarded a grant to study the implementation of the "Equivalent Standing for Mature Students" policy of the Ministry of Education, Program and Diploma Requirements 1984 (Section 6.14, pp. 33-34) in Ontario secondary schools.

The first phase of this study calls for an assessment of the extent to which the policy is used in the Province. Attached is a brief questionnaire that addresses this question. I would be grateful if you or the appropriate designate would complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope by February 24, 1989.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Alan M. Thomas

Alan M. Thomas
Professor

/jm
Encls.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6 Tel. 923-6641
Department of Adult Education

April 12, 1989

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Recently, you (or a member of your Board) completed a brief questionnaire on the implementation of the "Equivalent Standing For Mature Students" policy of the Ministry of Education (Program and Diploma Requirements 1984, Section 6.14, pp. 33-34), in which you indicated your Board's willingness to participate in the next phase of the study. At this time, I am writing to thank you and to advise you that your Board was not among those currently selected for inclusion in the second phase of the study.

Response to the questionnaire was excellent and more than half the boards responding indicated a desire to participate in the larger study. Unfortunately, not all interested respondents could be included as Phase 2 is limited to a small number of school boards, stratified by region, size and equivalent credit granting experience. However, you may hear further from us, should it become desirable to extend the sample to a larger number of school boards.

Thank you, once again, for your cooperation in completing the questionnaire and for your interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Thomas
Principal Investigator

March 20, 1989

Recently, you (or a member of your Board) completed a brief questionnaire on the implementation of the "Equivalent Standing for Mature Students" policy of the Ministry of Education (Program and Diploma Requirements 1984, Section 6.14, pp. 33-34), in which you indicated your Board's willingness to participate in the next phase of the study. At this time, I am writing to formally invite the participation of The Frontenac County Board of Education in the larger study (a summary of the proposal is attached).

As you know, enrollment of mature students in public secondary schools has increased markedly in recent years, but little generally is known about the different practices and procedures that currently exist to accommodate these students. Our intention is to examine questions of practices and procedures in some detail by surveying a sample of school boards and schools within those boards in the current academic year.

This study is being carried out in three phases. Phase I, which recently was completed, was a provincial survey of Board-level practices associated with the Ontario Equivalent Standing For Mature Students policy. Phase 2 will involve a detailed examination of these practices and related problems in selected school boards. Since preliminary analysis of the data obtained in Phase I suggests that procedures can either be centralized or delegated to local school principals, we intend to examine the process under both conditions through a combination of methods, including face-to-face or telephone interviews with the person(s) responsible for carrying out assessments. In addition, we will want to obtain enrollment and demographic data that may need to be compiled from individual school or board records as well as samples of relevant materials, such as policy statements, descriptions of procedures, etc. Phase 3 will be an in-depth study of selected individuals (e.g. principals, teachers, students) in particularly active boards, based on a preliminary analysis of the data collected in Phases 1 and 2.

The study is being conducted under the auspices of the Department of Adult Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Funding is provided through the Transfer Grant to OISE by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Pursuant to Section 39(2)

of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1987, any personal information required for research purposes is collected under the legal authority of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Act, R.S.O. 1980, C.341. The data obtained in the study shall remain the property of OISE and shall neither be released nor disclosed for purposes other than scholarly research and related reports by the undersigned and/or his associates. All information will be treated confidentially and anonymously in any materials resulting from the study. A copy of the final report shall be made available to participating boards at the end of the study.

We would like to include The Frontenac County Board of Education in Phase 2 of this study, which implies willingness to participate in Phase 3. Participation will require: (1) providing permission to invite one or more persons (e.g. board personnel, secondary school principals, teachers, students) to participate in the study and possibly suggesting names of appropriate persons who might be contacted; (2) providing permission to conduct interviews within the Board's jurisdiction; and (3) providing permission to obtain statistical and/or demographic data from Board and school records. Separate written consent will, of course, be obtained from each school/person invited to participate in the study.

We would be pleased to satisfy any requirements beyond this request to obtain permission to conduct research within the Board, including the completion of any special forms. It would be appreciated if we can be advised of same at your earliest convenience. Should you prefer to discuss this project with me before making your decision, please contact me at the above number. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Thomas
Principal Investigator

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Department of Adult Education

SURVEY OF UTILIZATION OF EQUIVALENT STANDING POLICY

(Note: Please complete BOTH sides of this sheet)

I. **GENERAL INFORMATION:** (Please respond in space provided. Use approximate figures if necessary; Answer "NA" if no information is available.)

1. Name of school board: _____

2. Number of secondary schools in board: _____ schools

3. Number of secondary students currently enrolled in CREDIT courses:

   a) _____ Total Students b) _____ FTE's

4. Of the above, how many are mature students (as defined by Ministry of Education Program and Diploma Requirements, 1984, p. 37)? _____ students

5. How many equivalent-credit allowances (as defined by Ministry of Education, 1984, pp. 33-34) were granted in the past year (1987-88)?:

   a) _____ total credits
   b) _____ maturity credits
   c) _____ equivalent-education credits
   d) _____ apprenticeship-training credits

6. How many applications for equivalent credit allowances were received in?:

   a) 1987-88 _____ b) Current academic year _____

7. Does the Board maintain central records (e.g. statistics) that distinguish between mature and regular (adolescent) credit students? _____

(Please turn page over)

June 23 1989

Appendix

FIELD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. 1. There are three types of credits given for equivalent standing; life-experience, external courses, and apprenticeship. Can you indicate the numbers of students in each of the three categories that received credit in 1988-89.

2. Did this repreent an increase in number over the previous years? In which categories?

3. What was the age range among the applicants?

4. What was the sex distribution?

B. 1. Can you describe the policy used by your Board with respect to assessing equivalent standing? Is it in writing? Is it available? Is it a Board-wide policy or does it permit differences in different schools ? How long has it been in force? How frequently is it revised?

2. Do the practices differ with the different types of equivalency awards?

3. At what stage in his or her program does the student actually get the credits?

4. On what grounds might a student be refused a credit or credits? How is this decision handled - in writing or verbally?

C. 1. Would you describe in detail the process involved in a student applying for consideration for equivalent standing?
How might a student find out about the availability?
How is application made? Is there a special, written application form?
Is there an interview? How long does it usually take?
By whom is the interview usually conducted?

2. What type of information is the applicant required to provide? How is the information verified? Is different information required for each type of equivalency?

3. How long does the entire process usually take? Could you describe a couple of examples?

4. How are the various equivalencies reported on student records? Has this posed any problems?

D. 1. Who usually makes the assessment? Is more than one person usually involved? Do those involved fall into particular classifications?

2. What sort of training or background does the person(s) have? Are there

any specially designed training programs provided for such people, that you know of? What sort of training do you think the repsonsible person should have?

3. What sort of factors are taken into account in making the assessment? Is there a formula applied in every case? What sort of information is required? Are there any written tests?

4. Are applicants ever turned down entirely? What would the reasons be?

5. What particular difficulties are encountered in making these assessments?

6. What is the general attitude of the applicants? Are they surprised to find that such an opportunity exists? Are they generally grateful for the opportunity, or do they see it as a matter of rights? Do they complain often about comparative assessment? Has any student threatened to go his or her trustee, or to take him or her to court?

E. 1. Do you think this is a good policy?

2. What are its benefits - for the student? for the school? for education in Ontario? What drawbacks does it present?

3. Does it work well as it is presently designed?
What changes might improve it?

F. 1. Have you tracked the subsequent career of any of the individuals who have received equivalent awards? Is the information available?

2. Do you know of any student(s) who are eligible for equivalent credits, but who deliberately do not apply?

3. Can you recall having made any major mistakes in assessment? What were you able to do about the situation?

Dear :

Please find attached a copy of your completed MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION for EQUIVALENT CREDITS form.

The information contained on the form indicates your educational status as a result of the assessment completed by the Guidance Department you visited and as confirmed by me.

When reviewing the information on the form, please make sure you read and understand the content under the headings "REMARKS" and "FINAL RECOMMENDATION".

Should you have any questions regarding any aspect of this evaluation, please contact me at your convenience.

Good luck in your future endeavours.

Yours truly,

EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS

I. PROCESS

The process described below is to be followed for ANY persons requesting EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS.

a) the person completes an Application for Equivalent Standing;

b) an interview takes place involving the person making the request and a school based person (e.g., Head of Guidance, Principal-C.E., etc.)

c) a Mature Student Evaluation form is completed including supporting documents. The completed form will indicate what credits the person has accumulated while he/she attended regular day school and as a mature student. The completed form will also show the maturity credits recommended and the subjects to be completed to fulfill the requirements for an O.S.S.D.;

d) the Mature Student Evaluation form and documents as outlined in c) above are forwarded to the Principal-C.E. for approval;

e) once approved, the Principal-C.E. will forward copies of the form to:
   i) the applicant;
   ii) the school to be filed in the applicants O.S.R.

NOTE: 1. Persons preparing the Mature Student Evaluation Form as in c) above SHOULD NOT MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THE APPLICANTS AS TO WHAT CREDITS THE LATTER WILL DEFINITELY BE AWARDED SINCE THE RECOMMENDED CREDITS MAY BE ALTERED PRIOR TO FINAL APPROVAL.

2. Mature credits (item #6 on the form) will be withheld subject to the successful completion of one or more of the required subjects (item #7 on the form) by the applicant. Mature credits, when granted should be recorded in Section C of the OSR.

3. Where the official documentation required for items #1-5 on the form is either partially or totally unavailable, the Principal-C.E. shall have the authority to approve such documentation.

ANY RULING SHOULD NOT BE UNDULY BURDENSOME ON THE APPLICANT, BUT SHOULD BE MADE IN HIS/HER BEST INTERESTS.

II. GUIDELINES FOR GRANTING EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS

O.S.I.S. - Section 6.14 outlines the Special Provisions for Earning Credits and Diplomas. For Maturity credits the following distinctions should be noted:

a) MATURE STUDENT - for purposes of determining further required credits for a diploma, a mature student is defined as a student who is at least 18 years old and who has not attended day school for a period of at least one year.

b) MATURE STUDENTS WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY ACCUMULATED FEWER THAN 26 CREDITS - shall earn at least 4 Ontario credits normally taken by students in Grades 11 or 12;

c) MATURE STUDENTS WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY ACCUMULATED 26 OR MORE CREDITS - shall complete the required number of credits to bring their total up to a minimum of 30 credits.

NOTE: The number of credits to be awarded for secondary school grades/years completed prior to the introduction of the CREDIT SYSTEM (i.e., before 1969) is as follows: for GRADE 9 - 8 credits
for GRADE 10 - 8 credits
for GRADE 11 - 7 credits

1. Maturity Allowance - (up to 12 credits may be awarded using the following)

i) 2 credits per year for age/working experience.
ii) credits will be accumulated from the time of leaving school even if this occurred before reaching the age of 18.
iii) such credits may be used to cover the mandatory requirements designated for an O.S.S.D. in O.S.I.S.

STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN OUT OF SCHOOL FOR 6 YEARS SHOULD BE INFORMED THAT THEY MAY BE RE-EVALUATED FOR MATURITY CREDIT PURPOSES.

2. Equivalent Education Allowance - (no limit on number of credits)

i) courses which are given by organizations other than secondary schools may be used for credits. Such organizations might include private business schools, armed forces, business firms, private trade schools, etc.

ii) each such course that contains work that would normally be completed after 110 hours of instruction may receive ONE credit.

iii) combining 2 or more courses of varying length to accumulated a total of 110 hours is permissible.

iv) EXEMPTED FROM QUALIFYING FOR THIS ALLOWANCE ARE CREDIT COURSES FROM POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL INSTITUTIONS.

3. Apprenticeship Training Allowance (up to 6 credits)

i) Two equivalent credits may also be allotted for the successful completion of each period of an apprenticeship training program under authority of The Apprenticeship and Tradesmen's Qualification Act, Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1980, chapter 24, or for each six units of a modular training program taken over and above the prescribed academic entry requirements of the particular training program authorized under the act cited above.

ii) acceptable apprenticeships must be under the authority of the Apprenticeship and Tradesman's Qualification Act. Some company apprenticeships do not come under this Act.

MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION FOR EQUIVALENT CREDITS

Year of First Registration in Secondary School: 1980-81
Last Year of Secondary Day School Attendance: 1982-83
Last School Attended:

	Approved Credits
1. Intermediate Division Credits	.00
2. Senior Division Credits taken prior to achievement of Mature Student Stutus - (both Day School and Night School credits)	3.00
3. Apprenticeship Credits	3.00
4. Equivalent Education - Other courses non Secondary School nature	3.00
5. Additional Senior Division Credits taken subsequent to achievement of Mature Student Status (minimum of 4 required before SSGD can be issued)	3.00
Total to this point	12.00
6. Mature Credits Recommended	3.00
7. Requirements to be met for Diploma	15.00

Final Recommendation

Upon successful completion of 15.00 additional senior division credit(s) (grades 11 and 12) 1 of which must be a senior division English, may be granted an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Principal,
Date: April 04,1989

MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION FOR EQUIVALENT CREDIT

MR.
MRS.
MISS _____

ADDRESS _____
POSTAL CODE

TELEPHONE _____ SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBER _____

DATE OF BIRTH _____ COUNTY SAS NUMBER (if available) _____

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED _____

DATE OF FIRST REGISTRATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL _____ DATE OF LEAVING DAY SCHOOL _____

	Credits Recommended by School	Credits Confirmed by Principal-C.E
1. Intermediate Division Credits (Includet transcripts)	☐	☐
2. Senior Division Credits taken prior to achievement of Mature Student Status - (both Day School and Night School Credits) (Include transcripts)	☐	☐
3. Apprenticeship Credits (Include supporting documents)	☐	☐
4. Equivalent Education-Other courses of non-Secondary School nature (Include Transcripts, Diploma, Length of Course, Descriptions, etc.)	☐	☐
5. Additional Senior Division Credits taken subsequent to Achievement of Mature Student Status (Minimum of 4 required before OSSD can be issued) - (Include Transcripts)	☐	☐
TOTAL TO THIS POINT	◯	◯
6. Maturity Credits Recommended	☐	☐
7. Requirements to be met for Diploma (Detail compulsory subjects, etc. in Remarks)	☐	☐

REMARKS

_____

_____

_____

DATE _____ SCHOOL _____ COUNSELLOR _____

_____ _____

Final Recommendation:

CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM

APPLICATION FOR EQUIVALENT STANDING (MATURE STUDENT)

- PLEASE PRINT -

A. NAME: Miss Mrs. Mr. Ms. _____

Maiden Name: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

_____

Include Postal Code

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ / _____ / _____
Day Month Year

S.I.N.: ___ - ___ - _____

TELEPHONE - (HOME): _____ - (BUSINESS): _____

B. SECONDARY SCHOOL RECORD:

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

DATE OF LEAVING: _____

SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADES/CREDITS ALREADY ACCUMULATED (Include schools and dates, if known):

_____

_____

_____

_____

C. EMPLOYMENT RECORD: (Include employers, type of work, position held, and dates, if known):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

.....(over)

D. ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE (Include volunteer work and community service, etc.):

E. ADDITIONAL (NON-SECONDARY) EDUCATION & TRAINING (Include details & documentation):

The above information is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and complete, and is provided for the sole purpose of assessing my eligibility for mature student equivalent standing.

DATE: _____ APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE: _____

Revised April 11, 1988

GUIDELINES FOR GRANTING EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURITY AND EQUIVALENT EDUCATION AND APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To develop guidelines for granting and recording equivalent credits that will promote consistent practices.

2.0 General

2.1 Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior, Section 6.14 outlines the responsibilities of the principal with regard to granting equivalent credit allowances.

2.2 In order to earn an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (or a Secondary School Graduation Diploma until 1989), a student must earn four senior credits through secondary school programs, subsequent to becoming a mature student.

2.3 Each individual mature student should be interviewed and mature student credits and/or education credits granted according to the experience, age, and needs of the student.

2.4 The number of equivalency credits a student can receive is limited. The allowance for maturity, equivalent education and apprenticeship training, plus previously earned secondary school credits, cannot total more than 26 credits for students pursuing an O.S.S.D. or 23 credits for students pursuing a S.S.G.D. (until 1989).

3.0 Maturity Allowance

3.1 The student's age and number of years out of school should be considered.

3.2 Any work experience should be considered.

3.3 Volunteer work and any other experiences in the adult world should be considered.

3.4 Interest courses, conferences and other learning experiences that do not qualify for equivalent education credits should be considered.

3.5 Parenting.

3.6 Conditions

3.6.1 The applicant shall provide a written summary of work experience, volunteer experience and other learning experiences.

3.6.2 The maximum number of credits that can be granted for maturity is twelve.

4.0 Recording Maturity Credits

4.1 The number of credits to be awarded for maturity should be discussed with the student. An agreement will normally be reached that these credits will be recorded on Section C of the Ontario Student Record after the successful completion of one additional credit at the Senior Division level in a secondary school program.

4.2 The student should be given a copy of this agreement. (Sample Statement of Standing forms are appended to this document - Appendices B & C.)

5.0 Equivalent Education Allowance

5.1 Equivalent education allowance credits should be granted only for courses that are not normally identified as secondary school programs and that do not qualify for college or university credit.

5.2 Documentation will usually be required for equivalent education credits.

5.3 Credits must be allotted on the basis of time spent on the course. One credit can be allotted for each 110 hours of course time. Partial credits may be allotted for courses of shorter duration.

5.4 The following types of courses may be considered for equivalent education allowances:

5.4.1 on-the-job in-service courses:
e.g., Nurse's Aide Courses, Canadian Forces Trades Course

5.4.2 private trade school courses:
e.g., School of Hair Dressing

5.4.3 documented interest courses:
e.g., St. John Ambulance, Red Cross Swimming, Power Squadron, C.P.R., First Aid, night school interest courses

5.4.4 other documented learning experiences;
e.g., Manpower Retraining Courses

6.0 Apprenticeship-Training Allowance

6.1 A maximum of two equivalent credits may be awarded for successful completion of each period of a recognized apprenticeship-training program.

6.2 In modular training programs, two equivalent credits may be allotted for each six units taken over and above the prescribed academic entry requirements of the particular training program.

6.3 The Apprenticeship and Tradesmen's Qualification Act, R.S.O., 1980, Chapter 24, is the authority for approved apprenticeship-training programs.

7.0 General Requirements for Remaining Credits

7.1 The principal may stipulate general requirements for the remaining credits which a student must earn in order to earn a diploma.

8.0 Form for Assessing and Recording

8.1 Attached are forms that can be used in the assessment of an applicant's status and in the recording of equivalency credits.

Attachments

Mature Student Evaluation

1. Definition

A mature student is one who is at least 18 years of age and has been out of high school for a year or more.

2. Procedure

(a) Complete the attached application form.

(b) Provide an official transcript of marks obtainable from the Student Services Department of the last high school attended.

(c) Provide transcripts or proof of any high school credit courses successfully completed through night school, summer school or correspondence courses.

(d) Provide proof of any periods of a recognized apprenticeship training program, successfully completed.

3. Statement

Following an evaluation of the educational background, formal training, work experience and maturity, a determination will be made and a statement given to the applicant. This statement will indicate the number of equivalency credits for which the applicant is eligible and the number of credits required to complete the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma. The equivalency credits shall not be added to the Ontario Student Record until at least one Senior Division credit has been earned subsequent to the determination.

MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION FORM

(A mature student is at least 18 years of age and has withdravn from school for a period of at least one year befor application.)

A. Statistical Information (Please fill in this form as completely as possible)

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Telephone _____ Home _____ Other

Name of Last Day School Attended _____

Address _____

Year and Month of Last Attendance _____

Are you currently enrolled in any type of course? _____ Yes _____ No

If "yes", name of school/institution _____

_____

Present Employment _____

Position _____

_____ Signature of Student _____ Date

B. Work Experience -- Begin with your most recent employment

Employer	Type of Work	Date From	Date To

C. Volunteer Work -- Begin with the most recent experience

Institution/Agency	Type of Work	Date From	Date To

D. List interest courses, upgrading courses, retraining courses and on-the-job courses which you have taken. Provide proof if available.

E. Other Relevant Information (Special Skills, Parenting Experiences, etc.)

F. FOR SCHOOL USE ONLY

School _____

Credits Granted

Maturity _____ Equivalent Education _____ Apprenticeship _____

These will be recorded on the O.S.R. after completion of one Senior Credit.

Date _____

STATEMENT OF STANDING

STUDENT: _____ DATE OF BIRTH: _____

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED: _____

ADDRESS: _____

DATE OF RETIREMENT: _____

INTERMEDIATE CREDITS: _____

SENIOR CREDITS: _____

EQUIVALENCY CREDITS:

Maturity _____ Equivalent Education _____ Apprenticeship _____

These Equivalency Credits will be recorded on the O.S.R. when one (1) Senior Credit has been earned subsequent to this date.

Requirements still to be met for a Secondary School Graduation Diploma:

_____

_____

_____

Assessed by: _____ Date: _____

THIS IS AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT AND SHOULD BE SAFEGUARDED AGAINST LOSS

MATURE STUDENTS - STATEMENT OF STANDING

NAME: _____, _____
Surname Given Names

BIRTHDATE: _____ NAME ON SCHOOL RECORDS IF DIFFERENT: _____
YY MM DD

ADDRESS: _____
Street and Number City Postal Code

++

A - SECONDARY SCHOOL CREDITS

SCHOOL(S)	YEAR(S)	CREDIT(S)
	TOTAL	+ ☐

B - MATURITY/EQUIVALENT CREDITS (See attached for details)

Maturity		
Equivalent		+ ☐
	TOTAL	

TOTAL EARNED CREDITS ☐

C - STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENTS

Please indicate the requirements, including courses to be taken, that must be met before the O.S.S. Diploma will be granted.

_____

_____

_____

_____

SIGNATURES:

ASSESSOR: _____ APPLICANT: _____

DATE: _____

FOR INTERNAL SCHOOL USE

TOTAL EARNED CREDITS
(previous page) ☐

PLANNED CREDITS

COURSES	YEAR(S)	NO. OF CREDITS

TOTAL POTENTIAL CREDITS + ☐

TOTAL POTENTIAL DIPLOMA CREDITS ☐

MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION FOR EQUIVALENT CREDITS

MR.
MRS.
MISS. _____ _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

ADDRESS _____ POSTAL CODE _____

TELEPHONE _____ SOCIAL INS. NUMBER _____

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED AND ADDRESS _____

DATE OF FIRST REGISTRATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL _____ DATE OF LEAVING SCHOOL _____

		NO. OF CREDITS TOWARDS AN S.S.G.D. *(UNTIL AUG. 1989)	NO. OF CREDITS TOWARDS AN O.S.S.D.
1.	Intermediate division credits supported by transcripts	____	____
2.	Senior division credits taken prior to achievement of mature student status - (both day school and night school credits) include transcripts	____	____
3.	Apprenticeship credits include supporting documents	____	____
4.	Equivalent education - other courses of non-secondary school nature (include transcripts, diploma, length of course, description etc.,)	____	____
	TOTAL TO THIS POINT	____	____
5.	Maturity credits recommended (reserve judgement for students 18-20 until 4 additional senior credits above are completed)	____	____
6.	Additional senior division credits taken subsequent to achievement of mature student status (mimiumum if 4 required before SSGD/OSSD can be issued) transcripts required	____	____
7.	Requirements to be met for diploma (detail compulsory subjects, areas of study, etc., in remarks)	____	____

*SHOULD THIS PROGRAM NOT BE CONCLUDED BY 1989, CANDIDATES WILL NEED TO FULFIL THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AN ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA (O.S.S.D.)

REMARKS:

_____

_____

_____

DATE	SCHOOL/CENTRE	PRINCIPAL/ VICE PRINCIPAL	COUNSELLOR

MATURE STUDENT EVALUATION FOR EQUIVALENT CREDITS

MR.
MRS.
MISS. _____

ADDRESS _____ POSTAL CODE _____

TELEPHONE _____ SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBER _____

DATE OF BIRTH _____ DATE OF LEAVING SCHOOL _____

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED AND ADDRESS _____

DATE OF FIRST REGISTRATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL _____ DATE OF ATTAINMENT OF MATURE STATUS _____

	No. of Credits Recommended by Adult Education Counsellor	No. of Credits Confirmed by Adult Education Admin. Office
1. Intermediate Division Credits Supported by Transcripts	☐	☐
2. Senior Division Credits taken prior to achievement of Mature Student Status - (Both Day School and Night School Credits)- include transcripts	☐	☐
3. Apprenticeship Credits Include supporting documents	☐	☐
4. Equivalent Education - Other courses of non-Secondary School nature (include Transcripts, Diploma, Length of Course, Description, etc.)	☐	☐
5. Additional Senior Division Credits taken subsequent to Achievement of Mature Student Status (Minimum if 4 required before SSGD can be issued) - Transcripts required	☐	☐
TOTAL TO THIS POINT	☐	☐
6. Maturity Credits Recommended (Reserve judgement for students 18-20 until 4 additional Senior Credits above are completed)	☐	☐
7. Requirements to be met for Diploma (Detail compulsory subjects, Areas of Study, etc. in Remarks)	☐	☐

REMARKS

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ _____ _____

DATE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

FOR ADULT EDUCATION OFFICE ONLY

Final Recommendation _____

_____

DATE _____ SIGNED _____

Confirming Letter Sent _____ Date _____ Phone Call Made _____

TITLE : EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS

SECTION: III - F

PAGE: 1 of 2

DATE EFFECTIVE: September, 1984

DATE REVISED:

GUIDELINES FOR EQUIVALENT CREDIT ASSESSMENT

1. To be eligible for any mature student credits, the candidate must be 18 years of age and have been out of school for at least two years.

2. In addition to diploma credits already accumulated by students - credits for which transcripts can be produced, the following equivalent-credit allowances may be granted, using the criteria stated, to raise the total number of accumulated credits to a maximum of twenty-six (twenty-three if S.S.G.D. is available).

   Maturity Allowance (Maximum of 12 credits)

   i) **Length of Time Out of School**

   To be eligible for any credits in this area, the candidate must be at least 18 years of age and have been out of school for at least two years. Credits should be granted on the basis of one for each year out of school, provided the Principal judges each to have involved meaningful activity (e.g. raising a family, travel, volunteer work, etc.).

3. Equivalent-education credits should be granted as outlined in O.S.I.S. Note that courses considered post-secondary are not eligible. A course should be considered post-secondary if it is part of a program that normally requires a secondary school diploma for entrance. (Examples of courses eligible for equivalent-credit recognition -- Business College courses, Manpower Retraining courses, Hairdressing, etc.).

4. Apprenticeship-training credits should be granted on the basis outlined in O.S.I.S.

TITLE : EQUIVALENT STANDING FOR MATURE STUDENTS

SECTION: III - F

PAGE: 2 of 2

DATE EFFECTIVE: September, 1984

DATE REVISED:

PROCEDURES FOR EQUIVALENT CREDIT ASSESSMENT

1. Upon request, the Principal outlines to the candidate the existing regulations regarding mature and equivalent credits, confirming the credits already on record and indicating the areas in which the candidate may be granted credits.

2. The receiving Principal* makes the final assessment, using the attached form and provides appropriate recommendations regarding the nature of the courses to be taken and inserted in the official student record.

3. No equivalent credits are to be actually granted until the candidate demonstrates success in at least one of the courses to be taken to complete the diploma.

4. Notwithstanding the above and with due consideration to the convenience of the mature student candidate, the Principal may wish to direct the candidate to the Principal of the school through which diploma completion is likely to proceed for a formal assessment.

* "Receiving Principal" means the Principal of the institution selected by the candidate for diploma completion.

PROGRAM DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES MANUAL

TITLE : CREDITS FOR WORK COMPLETED IN ANOTHER SCHOOL	SECTION: III - H PAGE: 1 of 1 DATE EFFECTIVE: September, 1984 DATE REVISED:

These procedures are intended to provide guidance to the Principal in assessing and/or granting credit for school work completed prior to a student's transfer to his/her school from another during the school year.

1. In cases where the course in question can reasonably be continued in the receiving school, full credit shall be granted upon successful completion of the course. Evaluation information for the course obtainable from the sending school shall be taken into account in assessing the student's term and final standing in the course.

   In cases of unsuccessful completion of the course in question, the Principal is encouraged to use judgement in assessing whether or not the student should receive fractional credit for work successfulyy completed in the previously attended school. This would apply particularly in cases where, in the judgement of the teacher (or counsellor) and Principal, the circumstances of the transfer prevented successful completion of the course.

2. Where a course in which the student was enrolled in the previously attended school cannot be provided in the receiving school, the Principal shall use the information available from the sending school to determine the granting of fractional credits for work successfully completed. In cases where the transfer is from a school outside of Ontario, the Principal should use the equivalent credit guidelines found in O.S.I.S., Appendix D.

   The Principal may choose to defer the granting of any fractional credits until the end of the school year.